



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE returns cultural antiquities to Indian government**

*9<sup>th</sup> Century stone idol stolen from temple in India in 2000, recovered in a New York Gallery*

**NEW YORK, NY** – Department of Homeland Security officials today returned a stolen 250-pound, 9<sup>th</sup> Century stone idol to the Indian government after U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) investigators in New York seized it.

ICE agents in New York City launched their investigation in 2003 after receiving information from Interpol and police in India that led agents to Namkha Dorjee, owner and operator of the Bodhi Citta Gallery, who was operating out of an apartment located at 311 East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York City. The gallery owner voluntarily surrendered the idol to ICE last August.

Special Agent-in-Charge Martin D. Ficke explained, “When someone loots or steals a cultural artifact from a country, that country loses a part of its identity and its heritage. Today, we are able to return the Varaha Idol to the government and the people of India and restore a part of its cultural heritage that had been stolen from her.”

Ambassador Neelam Deo, Consul General of India, New York, thanked the Department of Homeland Security and ICE for its recovery of the Varaha Idol: “This is one of two Idols of Vishnu stolen from a temple in central India in March, 2000. The idol will shortly be transported back to its original location and reinstalled in the Varaha temple in Mandsour, Madhya Pradesh. The government and the people of India greatly appreciate this gesture of goodwill from the government and the people of the United States.”

The Idol of Dasha Avatar Varaha 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century AD is a stone idol of a four armed Varaha (Bhuvараह) with the drawings of Dashavatara. The idol depicts the Varaha incarnation of Vishnu and shows the killing of the Hiranya demon and the liberation of Prithivi. On the left elbow, Prithivi (earth) is shown as a feminine figure. Depicted around the idol are the other incarnations of Vishnu. This idol was placed in the center of all the deities on the platform of the idols. That is why the idol is called “the ten incarnations of Vishnu.”

The principal subject is Vishnu in his third incarnation (or “avatar”) as a boar. There are ten avatars or incarnations of Vishnu transforming from a lowly to exalted form culminating in “the Slayer.” In this Varaha aspect, Vishnu is said to have rescued the earth from being drowned by the demon Hiranyaksha. Varaha using his boar attributes rooted the earth from being drowned from the muddy bottom of the cosmic sea.

The sandstone idol is approximately 50” tall and 28” wide.

The appraised value is estimated at nearly \$30,000.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*

